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Washington News Clips
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A Summary of Major News Stories in DC

THE HILL

This week: Democrats revive net neutrality fight

By [Jordain Carney](#) and [Juliegrace Brufke](#) - 04/08/19 06:01 AM EDT [113](#)

House Democrats are set to revive a fight over the Obama-era net neutrality rules, putting them on a collision course with the White House and the GOP-controlled Senate.

House Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#) (D-Calif.) has set a vote for Tuesday on the Save the Internet Act, which would reinstate the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) regulations requiring internet service providers to treat all web traffic equally.

The Obama-era rules prohibited internet service providers from blocking or throttling web content or from creating internet fast lanes.

Democrats argue the bill is a necessary step to ensure the internet remains accessible to all.

"This bill will reverse the administration's repeal of critical net neutrality protections which will empower the SEC to prohibit unjust, unreasonable and discriminatory practices and ensures consumers can make informed decisions when shopping for internet plans," House Majority Leader [Steny Hoyer](#) (D-Md.) said on the floor Thursday.

But critics argue the bill places bureaucrats in charge of the internet, which they feel could have strong negative implications.

"I look forward to a robust debate on the inaptly titled bill Save the Internet. I think a lot of people shiver at the thought of federal government saving us from the internet and the title 2 regulation that would be imposed would allow the internet to be regulated like a utility," House Minority Whip [Steve Scalise](#) (R-La.) said in response to Hoyer's remarks on the floor. "This is not the phone company of the 1970s this is probably one of the greatest innovations that America has produced for the world, allowing us to be a world leader, a dominant leader in the growing technology field."

Republicans [tried, without success](#), to amend the Democrats' bill in committee including undercutting the FCC's authority to enforce the rules. They also called for Democrats to come up with a compromise bill that would establish less oversight of the broadband industry.

A majority of the Senate voted last year to reinstate the Obama-era FCC's net neutrality rules.

Democrats were able to force the 2018 vote under the Congressional Review Act (CRA), which allows Congress, with a majority vote in each chamber and the president's signature, to overturn recent agency moves.

Three Republicans — Sens. [Susan Collins](#) (Maine), [Lisa Murkowski](#) (Alaska) and [John Kennedy](#) (La.) — joined the, at the time, 49 Senate Democrats to pass the bill 52-47. But it died in the then GOP-controlled House last year.

"This is a second chance to right the Trump administration's wrong," Senate Minority Leader [Chuck Schumer](#) (D-N.Y.) said at a press conference last month where Democrats introduced the new bill.

But Senate Democrats now only hold 47 seats in the chamber, after Republicans netted two additional seats during the 2018 midterm election. And the 60-day window for forcing a vote on the bill under the Congressional Review Act lapsed last year, giving the new legislation long odds in the GOP-controlled Senate.

White nationalism hearing

The House Judiciary Committee is scheduled to hold a hearing on hate crimes and the rise of white nationalism on Tuesday.

“This hearing will examine hate crimes, the impact white nationalist groups have on American communities and the spread of white identity ideology. The hearing will also foster ideas about what social media companies can do to stem white nationalist propaganda and hate speech online,” the committee said in a statement.

Candace Owens, Turning Point USA communications director and prominent African-American conservative activist, is slated to testify before the committee.

Eva Paterson of the Equal Justice Society, and Neil Potts, who serves as the public policy director of Facebook and Eileen Hershenov of the Anti-Defamation League, are also scheduled as witnesses.

Budget

The House could potentially take up legislation on the floor that would lift spending caps by \$133 billion over the course of two years.

Under the legislation, the nondefense cap would increase to the \$646 billion while the defense cap would climb to \$680 billion in 2021. Congress has until the end of September to work out a deal on defense and non-defense spending caps and avoid sequestration kicks kicking back in.

The bill advanced out of committee last week, with some progressives pushing back against the measure due to its hike in defense spending.

The GOP-controlled Senate Budget Committee [passed its own spending plan](#) late last month, though GOP leadership hasn’t indicated if it will be brought to the floor for a vote.

The Senate's budget sticks to the legal caps for defense — falling from \$716 billion to \$643 billion, including off-book funds — and nondefense, which would drop from \$640 billion to \$542 billion. The overall reductions would amount to \$126 billion.

Dem retreat

House Democrats are slated to hold their retreat — which was initially scheduled for February but was postponed to allow negotiators time to reach a deal on funding the government — in Leesburg, Va., from April 10-12.

The theme of the retreat is “100 Days In: Fighting For The People,” where members are slated to discuss their accomplishments since they took back the majority in the lower chamber and their priorities and agenda moving forward.

Speakers at the retreat, which is being led by Democratic Caucus Chairman [Hakeem Jeffries](#) (D-N.Y.) , include Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell, singer John Legend and his wife, supermodel and best-selling author Chrissy Teigen.

Barr

Attorney General [William Barr](#) will appear before Congress in back-to-back hearings this week, marking his first public appearance on Capitol Hill since the end of special counsel [Robert Mueller](#)’s probe into the 2016 election.

Barr is scheduled to appear before a House Appropriations subcommittee on Tuesday before crossing the Capitol to appear before the Senate Appropriations Committee on Wednesday.

The hearings are for lawmakers to question Barr on the department’s fiscal year 2020 budget request. But it will also mark the first time for lawmakers to be able to publicly question Barr about Mueller’s report, his four page letter summarizing the topline of the investigation and his plans for how much of the report will be made public.

Mueller handed over his report on the closely watched two year investigation last month. Barr, in a letter to the House and Senate Judiciary Committee late last month, said he anticipated that he would be able to release the report by mid-April and that he would testify before the Judiciary Committees in early May.

His appearance in two committee hearings this week comes after [The New York Times reported](#) that some members of Mueller's team believe the letter from Barr that summarized the principal conclusions didn't sufficiently portray their findings, which they suggested could be more damaging to Trump than Barr conveyed.

Nominations

Senate Republicans are set to rev up the nominations conveyor belt after using the “nuclear option” last week to cut down on the amount of time it takes to confirm most of [President Trump](#)'s nominees.

Majority Leader [Mitch McConnell](#) (R-Ky.) has teed up six nominations to get votes in the Senate. Under the old rules, senators would not have been able to finish up all of the nominees this week, with lawmakers expected to leave town for a two-week recess after Thursday.

Under the new rules, Republicans could squeeze in all six nominations by the end of Wednesday, and still tee up additional nominations for Thursday before they leave town.

McConnell has scheduled district court nominees Daniel Desmond Domenico, Patrick Wyrick, Holly Brady and David Steven Morales, as well as Cheryl Marie Stanton's Labor Department nominations and John Abizaid to be the U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia.

Previously, nominations faced an additional 30 hours of debate even after they had defeated a filibuster proving they had the simple majority support needed to be confirmed. The rules change cut that from 30 hours to two hours for sub-cabinet executive nominations and district court nominations.

THE HILL

Nielsen out at Homeland Security

By [Jordan Fabian](#) and [Brett Samuels](#) - 04/07/19 06:06 PM EDT [12,241](#)

[President Trump](#) announced Sunday that Homeland Security Secretary [Kirstjen Nielsen](#) will leave her post, ending a rocky run as the top official in charge of implementing the president's hard-line immigration policies.

The decision, which Trump announced on Twitter, comes just two days after the president abruptly pulled back his nominee to lead Immigration and Customs Enforcement because he said he wants “to go in a tougher direction.” The moves signal that Trump is seeking to shake up his team amid frustration over the spike in migrant families crossing the southern border.

Trump tweeted that Kevin McAleenan, the commissioner of Customs and Border Protection, will lead the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) on an acting basis until a permanent replacement for Nielsen is chosen.

In her [resignation letter](#), Nielsen wrote that she had “determined that it is the right time for me to step aside.”

“I hope that the next secretary will have the support of Congress and the courts in fixing the laws which have impeded our ability to fully secure America’s borders and which have contributed to discord in our nation’s discourse,” she wrote.

The president thanked Nielsen for her service and said he has “confidence that Kevin will do a great job!” But he did not explain what led to her exit.

Nielsen led the sprawling department’s efforts on immigration enforcement, disaster relief, election security and cybersecurity since December 2017. She took over for her ally [John Kelly](#) as the head of DHS after he vacated the role to serve as White House chief of staff. Kelly left the White House at the end of 2018.

During her tenure, Nielsen dealt with persistent rumors that her job was in jeopardy as the president often seethed about the increase in migrant families and unaccompanied minors entering the U.S. and faulted her for not fixing the problem.

Trump last November was [set to fire](#) Nielsen, who had privately expressed frustration about dealing with the president’s anger over the situation at the border. But her job security once again became tenuous after Kelly’s exit last December. Kelly was a mentor to Nielsen and defended her against attacks from Trump and White House policy adviser Stephen Miller, an outspoken immigration hawk, according to reports.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request to explain Nielsen’s departure, but it reportedly came after she met with Trump on Sunday in the White House residence.

Nielsen also came under fire from Democrats for her role in defending the administration's immigration agenda, which they have criticized as cruel to migrant families.

Earlier this year, Nielsen became the public face of the administration's controversial "zero tolerance" policy that led to the separation of thousands of migrant families that illegally crossed the southern border.

Shortly after news broke of Nielsen's departure, Rep. [Bennie Thompson](#) (D-Miss.), chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, released a statement slamming her tenure as "a disaster from the start."

"It is clearer now than ever that the Trump administration's border security and immigration policies - that she enacted and helped craft - have been an abysmal failure and have helped create the humanitarian crisis at the border," Thompson said. "It is truly unfortunate that Nielsen refused to take responsibility for her actions and was simply unable to lead and stand up to the president for his misguided, wall obsessed anti-immigrant agenda."

Nielsen stood at the podium in the White House briefing room in June and insisted the administration did not have a policy of separating families and that only Congress could address the underlying issue. Within days of her remarks, Trump signed an executive order ending the practice.

She also was a vocal defender of Trump's controversial decision to declare a national emergency to circumvent Congress and obtain funding for a border wall. Nielsen cut short an overseas trip this week to spend three days along the border, even making an appearance with Trump at a newly renovated section of border fencing in Calexico, Calif.

While she earned praise from the president for her performances, Nielsen could not escape Trump's scorn as he sought to implement stricter immigration laws. She also reportedly considered resigning in May after he lashed out at her in a lengthy tirade during a Cabinet meeting.

Prior to her time in Trump's Cabinet, Nielsen served in the George W. Bush administration in the Transportation Security Administration and on the Homeland Security Council.

Nielsen also worked in the private sector and academia with a focus on cybersecurity before she returned to the federal government to work as Kelly's deputy both at DHS and at the White House.

Her departure will be viewed as a blow to DHS's cyber policies and operations, which she often championed and publicly discussed. The site CyberScoop reported last year that Nielsen had been offered the top cyber job at the department but that she was unable to decide whether to take up the post.

Nielsen was also a vocal advocate for improved election security as DHS sought to help state and local officials secure their elections after Russia interfered in the 2016 race.

THE HILL

Secrecy behind Saudi nuclear talks infuriates Congress

By [Rebecca Kheel](#) - 04/07/19 10:30 AM EDT [1,184](#)

Congressional anger is growing over [President Trump](#)'s efforts to secure a nuclear energy deal with Saudi Arabia.

Lawmakers first became wary of the plans when the Saudis refused to accept limits preventing them from developing a nuclear weapon.

But that skepticism quickly turned to fury when it was revealed that the Trump administration gave approval for companies to share certain nuclear energy technology with the kingdom without a broader nuclear deal in place.

Lawmakers are now demanding answers. They particularly want to know whether any of the approvals came after the October murder of U.S.-based journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul.

"First we want the information from [the Department of Energy], and we're demanding it. We should get it," said Sen. [Bob Menendez](#) (D-N.J.), the ranking member on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. "And I think it's critical to know exactly how this happened, when it happened and particularly were you doing this after Khashoggi?"

Congress has been re-evaluating the U.S.-Saudi relationship since Khashoggi's death, with lawmakers blaming Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for the killing.

Propelled in part by anger over Khashoggi's death, Congress last week sent Trump a resolution that would end U.S. military support for the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen's civil war.

Trump is expected to veto the resolution, making it the second veto of his presidency, and lawmakers are plotting their next steps to confront him for supporting the Saudis.

One potential avenue for expressing that anger is the administration's nuclear talks with Riyadh.

House Democrats began investigating the administration's nuclear talks with Saudi Arabia after the

Oversight and Reform Committee announced in February it was launching a probe to "determine whether the actions being pursued by the Trump administration are in the national security interests of the United States or, rather, serve those who stand to gain financially as a result of this potential change in U.S. foreign policy."

The investigation was launched in conjunction with the release of an interim report that included detailed allegations by unnamed whistleblowers that senior White House officials ignored warnings from legal and ethics advisers to stop pursuing the plan to sell nuclear reactors to Saudi Arabia.

The administration has been negotiating what's known as a 123 agreement with Saudi Arabia that would allow U.S. companies to sell nuclear reactors to the kingdom.

Riyadh has resisted an agreement that includes prohibitions on enriching uranium and reprocessing spent fuel to produce plutonium — essential steps in producing nuclear weapons.

Crown Prince Mohammed has also vowed his country would obtain a nuclear weapon if rival Iran does.

Satellite images first reported by Bloomberg News this past week show Saudi Arabia is nearing completion of its first nuclear facility.